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Special Education Value-Added Performance Evaluation Systems: A State-level Focus

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INTRODUCTION

Ensuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom has been a cornerstone of the current administration's education platform. This brief policy analysis focuses on the evaluation systems used in states for special educators, including related services providers. The document was completed as part of the Cooperative Agreement between Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

BACKGROUND

It is well known that teacher effectiveness has the strongest in-school impact on student achievement (Rivken et al., 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Differences in teacher effectiveness have important effects on students, including that one standard deviation difference in teacher effectiveness¹ is associated with at least 10% of a standard deviation in student's achievement on standardized assessments (Rivkin et al., 2005). Also, assigning students to stronger teachers over the years appears to have a cumulative positive effect on student learning (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Historically, measuring teacher effectiveness accurately has proven to be a challenge and teacher evaluation policies raise fundamental questions as to whether evaluations improve teacher practice and student learning. Most evaluation systems have been binary, either satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and have failed to provide teachers with information they need to make improvements in their instructional practice.

Another method of measuring teacher effectiveness is a value-added model. A value-added model is a group of statistical techniques that "attempt to control for a variety of student, school and classroom characteristics, including prior student achievement, in order to isolate the average effect of a given teacher on his or her students' learning" (Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2010, p 1.). A teacher's contribution can be estimated in a variety of ways, but typically requires subtracting the achievement test score of a teacher's students at the

¹ Teacher effectiveness is defined, generally by economists and statisticians, through statistical techniques known as value-added models, which attempt to control for student, school, and classroom characteristics to isolate the average effect of a specific teacher on that teacher's students' learning (Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2010)

beginning of the year from their score at the end of the year and making statistical adjustments for factors outside of the teacher's control. Baker et.al. (2010) describe how teachers of students with disabilities and others who work with the neediest students, are unfairly disadvantaged by value-added methods because these methods are not able to fully account for the differences in characteristics of these students and school supports given them. Thus, the methodological limitations of value-added models that rely on achievement test scores may underestimate the effectiveness of teachers who teach students with disabilities.

In an effort to meet the federal Race to the Top competition requirements, many state education agencies (SEAs) and even some local education agencies (LEAs) have passed legislation or designed new teacher evaluation systems that are based in part on teachers' valued-added estimates derived from student assessment scores. While student assessment scores arguably could provide for a more objective and valid measure of teacher effectiveness, there are some identified limitations. For example, annual statewide assessments are often incomplete measures of student learning, and year-to-year scaling of the tests is often inadequate. Moreover, student-teacher links are generally incomplete (Steele, Hamilton, and Stecher, 2010). This incompleteness of the student-teacher link is apparent in team teaching and co-teaching situations in which students with disabilities are often educated. Most students with disabilities are instructed by general educators, special educators and related services providers, making it difficult to accurately assign responsibility for student learning. The following sections of this document will describe how SEAs are dealing with performance evaluation, particularly value-added performance evaluation, of special educators, including related services providers.

METHODOLOGY

During August and September, 2011, Project Forum sent surveys to two groups of administrators in states and nonstate jurisdictions (hereafter referred to as states or SEAs) who are responsible for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); one to state directors of special education and the second to local directors of special education who were identified by state directors as implementing a value-added performance evaluation system. Responses were received from 30 states. No LEAs responded to the survey. Analysis of the findings involved the use of a computer-based survey and data analysis tool. The remaining sections of this document report the results of the survey.

FINDINGS

State Roles in Performance Evaluation Frameworks

Eighteen of the 30 responding states reported playing some role in performance evaluations for all educators and 10 of these 18 states reported that their state framework allows for differentiation to account for the specialized roles of special education teachers. Nine of the 10 states that differentiate their performance evaluation framework for special education teachers also differentiate for related services providers such as speech language pathologists and occupational and physical therapists. Further details are provided in the sections below.

Of the 12 states that do not currently have a role in performance evaluations for all educators, 10 have plans to do so. For example, *Maryland* is piloting its evaluation system in seven LEAs. Two evaluation frameworks, one for teachers and one for principals, have been developed. The teacher system consists of two ratings: professional practice (50%) and

multiple student growth measures (20% LEA and 30% SEA). Within the professional practice portion there are four domains: 1) planning and preparation; 2) classroom environment; 3) instruction; and 4) professional responsibilities. Other metrics may be devised by the LEA but approved by the *Maryland* SEA. The LEAs are expected to develop guidelines for acceptable evidence in meeting the professional practice component of the overall evaluation and describe how they will take complexity factors into consideration. The SEA has provided the two evaluation frameworks and will support the LEAs with technical assistance and professional development.

West Virginia is piloting a revised teacher, principal and school counselor evaluation in 25 schools this year. In *Wyoming*, legislation was recently enacted requiring a rigorous accountability system for LEAs that includes a component for teacher accountability (evaluating effectiveness) which links student achievement with teachers of record.² *Missouri* has developed educator standards for teachers and administrators. The SEA will help develop evaluation tools aligned with standards that LEAs may use to support performance-based evaluations. The SEA is also piloting student growth measures that LEAs may choose to use as part of an evaluation process. *Pennsylvania* piloted the Danielson practice model³ with select districts during the 2010-2011 school year and will do so again in 2011-12. This work was funded primarily through a Gates Foundation grant the state received to review teacher evaluation systems. The SEA is conducting preliminary discussions with relevant stakeholders around multiple measures, including student achievement and growth data. Two states specifically mentioned that, as in Race to the Top states, teacher performance evaluations will soon be linked to student performance.

None of the 10 states that are in the planning process for performance evaluation frameworks for all educators have any plans to allow for differentiation to account for the specialized roles and responsibilities of special educators or related services providers.

Differentiation of Performance Evaluation Frameworks for Special Educators

As previously mentioned, 10 states reported differentiation of their performance evaluation frameworks to account for the specialized roles and responsibilities of special educators, including nine states that also differentiate for related services providers. While five of these states are still in the process of determining how special educators' roles will be accounted for in their framework, some states described their system. For example, *Kentucky* statute and regulation allows for LEAs to approve performance standards and indicators for different educator roles or positions. *Utah* has created a model that each LEA can modify as it wishes to meet the individual needs of each profession. In *Florida*, each LEA is responsible for implementation and must submit plans to ensure differentiation. In *Palau*, the evaluation accommodates all employees of the government. Supervisors evaluate based on performance pertaining to the job descriptions and written comments on the form support ratings given to each employee. In *Louisiana* beginning in 2012-13, 50% of all teachers' evaluations will be based on measures of student growth. These measures will be specialized, based on teachers' content areas and grade levels. The SEA has convened educator workgroups to make recommendations regarding what these measures should look like in grades and subjects for

² For more information on Wyoming's teacher accountability legislation, go to <http://sos.wy.state.wy.us/Rules/RULES/8068.pdf> and <http://legisweb.state.wy.us/2011/bills/SF0070.pdf>.

³ The Charlotte Danielson teacher evaluation model incorporates procedures to promote professional learning, including self-assessment, reflection on practice and professional conversation. The theory behind this model is that through this evaluation teachers become more thoughtful and analytic about their work and are in a position to improve their teaching. For more information, go to <http://www.danielsongroup.org/coaching.htm>.

which value-added data are not available. One of these workgroups is entirely focused on special education teachers and is tasked with providing recommendations around the measures of student growth for these educators. A similar process will take place to determine appropriate measures of student growth for related service providers in a later phase of this process.

When asked what standards their special educator or related services provider evaluation system is or will be based on, six states reported that they will use state professional teaching standards, four reported the Interstate New Teacher Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards,⁴ four reported using Danielson's framework, and one reported using the Council for Exceptional Children's teaching standards.⁵

States reported the measurements that are used for individual special educators in their performance evaluation system as follows:

- Large-scale assessment scores (5)
- Curriculum-based measures (6)
- Student growth based on multiple years of student assessment scores (6)
- Observation protocols (8)
- Teacher portfolios (3)
- Progress toward IEP goals (3)
- Goal-driven professional development (5)

No states reported using groups' measures (i.e., student growth across the school, grade level or content area) for individual special educators' performance evaluation.

In order to credit individual contributions of special educators who are working in a co-teaching or consultant role, three states reported that all educators count each content area assessment score for each student that the educator's work supports as that educator's contribution (e.g., a speech language pathologist would count, from his/her caseload, each child's English language arts assessment scores as at least part of his/her evaluation). One state reported that educator teams will determine a percentage of each child's learning that is attributable to each educator on the team. Seven states reported that they are currently unsure how individual contributions of special educators who are working in a co-teaching or consultant role will be credited.

Two states that use student growth on assessment measures have not yet determined how they will set expected learning trajectories (or cut scores) for students with disabilities in order to provide performance evaluation based on these data. Two other states reported that they use the same cut scores for all students. Two states expect that similar student populations will be compared. For example, *Louisiana's* cut scores will be based primarily on previous achievement data for the student. Additional factors including gifted status, Section 504 status, student attendance, student disability status, limited English proficiency, prior discipline history, free lunch status, and classroom composite factors will also be taken into account.

⁴ For more information on the INTASC standards, go to [http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_\(InTASC\).html](http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/Interstate_Teacher_Assessment_Consortium_(InTASC).html).

⁵ For more information on the CEC teaching standards, go to <http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/>.

When states that use student growth on assessment measures to inform special educator evaluations were asked how those who work in a content area that is not assessed or with students who are assessed with an alternate assessment will be evaluated, eight states responded that they are currently unsure how they will accomplish this. One state foresees using local assessments and one state will use alternate measures of student growth that are yet to be determined.

Use of Evaluation Data for Special Educators

When asked how states will use evaluation data, one SEA that also functions as an LEA (*Palau*) reported that these data could be used for pay scale decisions. Two states (*Colorado* and *Kentucky*) reported that such data could be used for transfers to other assignments within the school or LEA, although *Colorado* reports that this is an LEA function not a state function. Six states reported that it will be used to target professional development, and six reported that it will be used to improve instruction. *Rhode Island* explained that if a teacher is found to be ineffective for multiple years, the teacher's certification may be revoked.

LEA Performance Evaluation Systems

Although 17 of the 30 responding states reported that they have LEAs that are developing or implementing an educator evaluation system that uses student growth on assessment measures to inform special educator evaluations, only two states approved Project Forum to contact their LEAs. None of the LEA staff for whom these states provided contact information responded to the survey.

Recommendations from States

Most responding states reported being too early in the development or implementation of their performance evaluation system to be able to provide recommendations. However, *Rhode Island* suggested that others might review their materials at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Default.aspx>. *Georgia* recommends reviewing their Race to the Top instruments when they are completed.

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